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"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM
YEAR TO YEAR."

All the Year Round

a
Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS

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ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS

No. 1045. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1888.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

AT THE MOMENT OF VICTORY.

By C. L. PIRKIS.

Author of "A Dateless Bargain," etc.

CHAPTER XLII.

"AH, a fine, handsome young fellow! Doesn't look the villain we've believed him to be—perhaps things have been a trifle exaggerated. But I must be discreet—very!" said Sir Peter to himself, as Count Palliardini crossed the room, and gave him for greeting the most courtly of bows.

The Count was tall, and slight in figure. His carriage was good, his dress was faultless. He had driven nine miles across country in a blustering gale, yet not a hair of his head seemed blown astray. The solution of this mystery lay in the fact that on arriving at the Castle, he had stopped for a good five minutes in front of a mirror in the hall to arrange his hair with a pocket-comb.

"Of the lazy, effeminate, Italian type," was Sir Peter's second thought, as he noted the young man's slow and languid movements.

And "his hand is the hand for the guitar, not the sword; depend upon it his prowess has been exaggerated," was his third and last thought as he looked at the slender, white hand which, for a moment, touched his, in response to his essentially English acknowledgement of the courtly bow.

"Now how shall I begin? I've a good deal to say," Sir Peter thought. Then a sudden fear seized him: "What if he doesn't understand English! The idea never struck me before."

The Count speedily set his mind at rest

by saying in excellent English, that he must beg Sir Peter to accept his apologies for his sudden and unceremonious arrival. He could only plead the extreme urgency of his business as his excuse.

Save for the roll of his R's, and the distinctness with which he spoke his final syllables, one might have set down English as his mother-tongue.

"No excuse is necessary, my dear sir," said Sir Peter, immensely relieved at the Count's linguistic capabilities. "Your name is not unknown to me. Only yesterday I was expressing a wish to make your acquaintance."

The Count for a moment let his large, black eyes rest on Sir Peter's face. "Now what is behind all this?" those eyes seemed to say.

He would have been greatly surprised if he had been told that nothing beyond a benevolent wish to deliver a homily on the duty of kindness and unselfishness lay behind the old gentleman's friendly speeches.

He acknowledged the friendliness with another courtly bow. Then he went on to explain the object of his visit, mentioning Miss McIvor by name, and speaking of her dead mother as a valued friend of his own.

"I have had some little difficulty in tracing the young lady to your house," he added. "If it had not been for her striking personal appearance, I don't suppose I should have succeeded in doing so through the many breaks in her journey."

"Ah, what made you fancy she had come to England?" queried Sir Peter, desirous to get a little time for himself in which to arrange the opening sentences of his lecture.

"I knew that Miss McIvor had relatives

in Scotland, and when she suddenly disappeared from her home I naturally concluded that she had gone on a visit to them. I had some little difficulty in discovering to which of the McIvors her father had belonged—there are so many of that name in Scotland—when, however, I succeeded in finding his people, and heard that she had not been near them, I set the police in Edinburgh, and in London, to work. It is thanks to their efforts that I am here."

Sir Peter was perplexed. He knew well enough what the Count's next question would be. He wished he had had time to consult Madge on the matter before rushing into so momentous an interview.

"Miss McIvor left us some little time back," he said, presently. "There, that tells him nothing," he added, to himself.

"Yes, I know," answered the Count. "It was the stir which her sudden departure from your house caused in the neighbourhood which enabled the police to trace her to Upton—but you have had news of her since she left?"

"Ah, yes—very satisfactory news, I'm glad to say."

"There, that tells him nothing," once more he added, to himself.

The Count looked at the old gentleman steadily. "I shall be much obliged if you will tell me where she is at the present moment, and the quickest way of getting to the place," he said, after a moment's pause.

Sir Peter pushed back his chair, rose from the table, and commenced a quick march round the room. Now or never for his homily, he thought; but really his ideas wanted a little arranging. "Let me see," he said to himself. "First, there's this gentleman to be reconciled to Miss McIvor—no, by-the-bye, he's in love with her already, it's the other way! Miss McIvor is to be reconciled to the Count. Ah, but we don't want her to fall in love with him—there's Lance to be thought of. Well, I must put in a good word for Lance somehow—I can't have these two young men quarrelling over the girl—and I must give this young man a little bit of good advice—what a blessing it is he speaks and understands English. Yes, I've a good deal to say, and before anything else I must be discreet—very!"

The Count kept his seat; his eyes following Sir Peter in his quick march.

"Is he a lunatic?" he thought, "or does he suffer from rheumatism? He seems a little jerky about the joints."

Sir Peter came to a stand-still in front of the Count's chair.

He laid his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder.

"My young friend, look at me. I'm an old man—old enough to be your father," he said.

The Count turned and looked at him. "No, it isn't rheumatism—flighty—but harmless—that's what he is!" he thought.

He bowed acquiescence in Sir Peter's remark.

Sir Peter went on briskly:

"I'm sure you'll agree with me that young men are sometimes the better for a little fatherly advice."

"A little fatherly advice!" repeated the Count, slowly, with just the faintest curl of his upper lip.

"Exactly. A little fatherly advice. Now, I have an adopted son of my own. He is about your own age; a fine young fellow like you; and what I say to you this morning I am going to say to him. 'Lance,' I shall say to him, 'the only way to get happily through life is to give and take.'"

"Ah, and this Signor Lance, this 'fine young fellow,' will listen to you, and do as you tell him—'Give and take'?"

Sir Peter shirked the question.

"I've a great deal to say," he began.

The Count pulled out his watch.

"Pardon me," he said, "if I say that my business is urgent and I have a train to save. I shall be greatly obliged to you if you will tell me where Miss McIvor is at the present moment, and allow me as quickly as possible to continue my journey."

Sir Peter was disconcerted.

"What I have to say is of great importance. It concerns you, it concerns Miss McIvor, and it concerns my adopted son, Lance."

There came a sudden change of expression to the Count's face.

"How can what concerns Miss McIvor and me concern also this Signor Lance?" he asked.

He was prepared to listen now, not a doubt, to what Sir Peter had to say.

Sir Peter shirked this question also. He made an apparently irrelevant remark.

"If we would be happy we must make others happy."

"Must we?"

"Now—pardon my saying so—it occurs to me that it is in your power to make two people very happy. Those two people are Miss McIvor and my boy Lance."

All the languor, in a moment, had gone out of those large Southern eyes upturned to Sir Peter's face.

"Miss McIvor's happiness is of importance to me. Your boy, Lance, I do not know."

"I shall be delighted to introduce you; we're expecting him back by every train. Ah! I ought to have told you that when Miss McIvor left us so suddenly, he went in search of her. Then, when he heard—ah! well, it's a long story. At any rate, he returned, and then set off again intending to go to Corsica."

"Ah, I would have welcomed him, this Signor Lance, if I had been there!" murmured the Count.

"I'm sure you would," said Sir Peter, heartily. "Now, where was I—I've lost myself somehow. I was going to say—ah, what was it?"

The old gentleman looked "very much mixed," and once more set off on a trot to the farther end of the room. A question from the Count, asked in a voice which Sir Peter had not heard before, brought him back.

"Tell me," he said: "this Signor Lance, did he take a very great interest in Miss McIvor?"

"A deep interest is no name for it, my dear sir, he fell desperately in love with her," answered the guileless Sir Peter; "and I'm bound to say that at first I was a little disconcerted at it—I had other views for him——"

"You had other views for him?"

"Yes—all this is in strict confidence, my dear sir—a marriage was as good as arranged between him and a lady—my ward, Mrs. Cohen—but bless me, I'm running on; this can't interest you in the slightest degree."

"I am deeply interested," said the Count, in the same voice as before. "The lady whom you wished the Signor Lance to marry, did she take a deep interest in Miss McIvor?"

"She did not at first, in fact I am sorry to say she took a most unaccountable dislike to the young lady; but afterwards, in a most noble, most unselfish way, she gave up all thought of her own happiness——"

He broke off abruptly.

"Ah, that's it," he cried, delightedly, "that brings me back to what I was going to say."

"Such sad news from the coast," said Madge, coming into the room at that

moment, all unconscious of Sir Peter's visitor. "A barque ran ashore last night, about three miles below St. Cuthbert's Church— Oh, I beg your pardon, I thought you were alone."

"A barque ashore!" cried Sir Peter, excitedly. Then he bethought him of the courtesies of life. "Madge, may I introduce to you the Count Palliardini?" He turned to the Count. "This is my ward, Mrs. Cohen."

Madge almost started in her amazement. She knew in a flash of thought that here was a crisis to be faced. She looked at the Count's slender, white hand, and thought of the stain of blood on it; she looked at his dark, handsome face, and said to herself: "An Iago with the face of an Adonis."

And the Count, as he bowed in acknowledgement of the introduction, took a slow, steady survey of Madge, and said to himself:

"She has no beauty; it is her lot to love better than she is loved. She is white and worn to a shadow; she has suffered. The little Marietta who broke her heart for me had much such a look in her eyes when I said to her: 'My child, we must part.'"

A DESPISED VALLEY.

IN autumn, whilst in Wharfedale, Wensleydale, and Swaledale, every wayside inn is crowded, you may wander for hours up the valley of the Aire and never meet a tourist. Yet this little dale, although perhaps less regularly beautiful than its neighbours, has a quaint charm which they do not possess, and is far richer than they in historic associations.

Even in its origin the Aire differs from the other Yorkshire rivers: they all begin their course as tiny rills or streamlets, and gradually increase in size as they advance; but the Aire is a full-blown river when it springs forth from under Malham Cove, a huge limestone cliff, some three hundred feet in height. Malham Tarn, too—the source whence the river derives most of its water—is itself an anomaly which, for centuries, puzzled the brains of geologists. It is a lake, apparently lying at the top of a fissured limestone rock, which, from its nature, can hold no water. A few years ago, however, it was discovered that, by some disturbance in the natural order of the strata, a great layer of slate and non-

fissured conglomerate had been brought to the surface, and that this forms the bed of the Tarn.

The scenery around Malham, although possessing undoubted beauty of outline, is hard and cold, for the grey limestone gleaming through the scanty turf casts an air of desolation on the scene, which recalls, in some subtle fashion, the memory of the moorlands when covered with half-melted snow. About a mile from the Cove is Gordale, a piece of the finest rock-scenery in England. Before it reaches Gordale, the valley between the high cliffs has become very narrow, and, as it advances, it contracts more and more, until at last it seems as if one great rock barred all further passage. To the left of it, however, there winds a tiny water-worn ravine, which leads into a little circular space enclosed by huge cliffs. Opposite the entrance, a stream of considerable volume rushes forth from the side of the rock, and dashing from peak to peak, forms a thousand fairy cascades as it falls. On the left, the cliff rises almost sheer; but, on the right, it is an immense overhanging crag, which, stretching nearly across the cave, seems to threaten with destruction those who enter. In all England we have not such an ideal Pythian dwelling as Gordale, with its foaming waters, thrilling echoes, and eternal gloom.

From Gordale, the Aire winds its way amongst great moss-covered stones; from time to time the rocks form a rugged gorge through which it rushes; then again these rocks recede, and leave it to wander through rich green meadows, where tall trees grow by its banks, and bend over its waters with tender caresses. But the rocks seem to be attracted by the stream, for they never leave it for long; sometimes, even, they cut across its course, and the river rushes down the cliff-side in one vast torrent. On the river goes, leaving behind it the rounded hills of Craven. The valley becomes rough and narrow towards Hawk-cliff, but it opens again with a wide sweep at Freighley; Rumeley's Moor towers one thousand three hundred feet above the river-bed; nor does the landscape change the rugged boldness of its character, until the Aire has passed through the gorge of Bramley; there the valley widens, and the thick plantations grow down to the water's edge. Soon, however, mill-dams and dye-works make their power for evil to be felt, and the silvery waters of

the Aire become black and noxious; but, when once it has left Leeds behind, it is again a pleasant river, and flows through well-wooded regions. Then it is joined by the Calder, a woodland stream as its name informs us, and the two flow on together through flat fertile meadows, which owe their being to the deposits made by fresh-water inundations. By this time the river has lost all claim to beauty, and sluggishly drags on its course until it reaches the Ouse, with which it travels down to the Humber, and thence to the North Sea.

Wharfe is clear, and Aire is lithe,
Where Aire drowns one, the Wharfe drowns five,
is still a favourite saying amongst the dalesmen; but, though the river itself may be free from reproach, in no valley in England has more blood been shed than in Airedale.

Calton, an unpretending village, a few miles from the head of the dale, was the birthplace of John Lambert, first Cromwell's most devoted friend, and then his bitterest enemy. When Lambert was fourteen, by the death of his father, he became the owner of a small estate near Calton; and, before he was twenty, he married an Airedale beauty, the daughter of Sir William Lister. He and his father-in-law warmly espoused the popular cause during the struggle between King Charles and his Parliament.

At length, as the crowning honour of his life, and a fitting reward for his stern devotion to the cause of freedom, he was sent down to his old home as Major-General—in other words supreme ruler—of the North. But, not even for the sake of retaining this exalted position would he hold parley with his conscience; and, when it began to be whispered abroad that his own nearest friend, the being on earth whom he most loved, was bent upon betraying the cause for which they had fought side by side, he would have sacrificed him as ruthlessly as Brutus sacrificed Cæsar. But, although the will was there the power was lacking, and the only result of Lambert's violent attack upon the Lord Protector, was that he himself was deprived of all his offices and power. Hard, stern man, as he was, there must have been a little touch of humanity in his nature, or he would not have sought a solace for his grief in the cultivation of flowers.

At some distance from the river, is Rylstone Hall, the home of Emily Norton, whose gentle spirit, according to a favourite dale tradition, passed at her death into a

doe of snowy whiteness, which used to haunt the Moorlands between Rylstone and Bolton Priory.

Gargrave, the most lovely village in Airedale, lies in a sheltered valley, with the North Craven range stretching before it and the great Flasby Moor behind. The monks of Sawley built a church here which, in its day, was regarded as an architectural marvel, but no trace of the edifice now remains, and only a few stones mark the site of the historic Roman villa, although, one hundred and fifty years ago, its beautiful tessellated pavement was still there in good condition.

A little further down the river is Skipton Castle, one of our strongest Feudal fortresses. It was built soon after the Conquest, by Robert de Romillé, to whom the Norman King gave the Craven district. It is an irregular building, consisting of five towers of immense strength, connected by means of long narrow corridors. The walls are from ten to twelve feet in thickness, and, as it is partially built into the side of a rock, it is only vulnerable on one side, and this, in the olden days, was surrounded by a moat.

The De Romillés must soon have forfeited their castle to the Crown, for Edward the Second presented it to his favourite, Piers Gaveston, after whose execution it passed into the hands of the Mortons' old enemies, the Cliffords—a family, even in the ruthless middle ages, distinguished for its ruthlessness.

The first Baron Clifford of Skipton was slain at Bannockburn; the second was taken prisoner at the battle of Boroughbridge, and condemned to death, but afterwards pardoned. Elizabeth, the daughter and heiress of another Baron, was married at the age of six, and her husband dying, she was married for the second time before she was twelve. The Cliffords were staunch Lancastrians, and Thomas, the eighth Baron, was killed at St. Albans, fighting against the Yorkists. His son, Black-faced Clifford—the most merciless of his merciless race though he was—loved his father with passionate devotion, and swore to avenge his death. And he kept his vow, when the victory at Wakefield gave him the power, for, in cold blood, he murdered the boy Earl of Rutland, and, by his ferocious cruelty to the other Yorkist prisoners, he gained for himself the title of the Butcher. He himself was slain a few months later in a skirmish not far from the banks of the Aire.

As soon as Edward of York was made King, Skipton was confiscated, and the Black-faced's only son, the Shepherd-Earl, as he was called, was forced to gain his livelihood as a peasant. He seems to have been a gentle, inoffensive being, with a strong taste for astronomy and alchemy; and although Henry the Seventh restored to him the family estates, he always lived at Barden Towers, in the most humble fashion. The little room in which he used to make his chemical experiments, is still in existence. Turner had it for his studio when he was making his Wharfedale sketches.

The Cliffords were firm in their allegiance to the Tudor sovereigns, and steadily grew in wealth and power whilst they were reigning, Henry the Eighth conferring on the then Baron Clifford the title of Earl of Cumberland.

Robert Aske, the leader of the Pilgrimage of Grace, was the cousin of the new Earl; but relationship did not prevent the bitterest enmity between the two, and, when the rebellion broke out, Skipton Castle was the first place to be attacked. There were chivalrous deeds done even in that dark age. The rebels, whilst besieging the Castle, sent word to the Earl that, if he did not surrender within three days, they would seize his wife and three little children, who were lodged in the Priory at Bolton; at the same time, they uttered some brutal jest as to the treatment these precious hostages would be subjected to. Robert Aske was away when this threatening message was sent; but as soon as he returned and heard what had been done, he despatched his brother to fetch the lady and her children, and had them secretly conveyed into the Castle before any one suspected what he was doing: thus preferring to risk, not only his popularity with his followers, but his very life, rather than that the wife of his bitterest enemy should be exposed to insult.

The eldest of the children thus saved commanded the "Elizabeth Bonaventura," one of the war-ships sent against the Armada; he distinguished himself by his bravery in action, and died from the effects of the wounds he received. But in spite of his gallantry and devotion to his country, in the judgement of his contemporaries he was "an indifferent and unfaithful husband, and a negligent and thoughtless parent." He left an only child, the Lady Anne, who

married the Earl of Dorset; and, after his death, the Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery. It was she who erected the monument to the memory of Edmund Spenser, which still stands in Westminster Abbey. She seems to have been a woman of considerable literary taste, for Sir Matthew Hale was her greatest friend, and for some years the poet Daniel was her tutor. The chronicles of the day speak of her as "an ornament to her sex and country"; but, if one may judge by her portrait, however great her virtues may have been, they did not prevent her possessing to the full the fierce passions of her race. Both she and her cousin, the Earl of Cumberland, were staunch Royalists; and, during the civil wars, Skipton Castle was besieged for three years by a Parliamentary army. It surrendered on December the twenty-second, 1645; but, in 1648, the Duke of Hamilton and his Scottish forces re-took it for the King. General Lambert, with a strong force, at once marched to the rescue, defeated the Duke, stormed the Castle, and dismantled it.

The Countess Anne was, at that time, the owner of the Castles of Brough, Brougham, Pendragon, Appleby, Barden, and Skipton, all of which had been more or less injured by the Parliamentary army; but nothing daunted by her misfortunes, no sooner did hostilities cease, than the sturdy dame set to work to rebuild her ruined fortresses, thus openly defying Major-General Lambert, whom she seems to have inspired with a most wholesome awe.

A characteristic little note written by this lady, is still extant. Charles the Second's Secretary of State had written to tell her that he wished a certain gentleman—a Court favourite—to be returned as member for Appleby, one of her pocket-boroughs. This is her reply:

"SIR,—I have been bullied by an usurper; I have been neglected by a Court; but I will not be dictated to by a subject. Your man shan't stand.

"ANNE DORSET, PEMBROKE AND MONTGOMERY."

By the marriage of the Countess Anne's daughter, Skipton passed into the hands of the Tuftons, its present owners.

A little below Skipton, at the bend of the Aire, is Kildwick Hall, an old gabled mansion surrounded by shady woods. A quarter of a mile distant is Farnhill Hall, a strong tower built at the top of a grassy knoll as a defence against the attacks of the Scots, who, in the olden days, liked

nothing better than a raid through the dales. Then comes Keighley, with its great chimneys, reminding us that the industrial region is near; but no one lingers there, nor at Shipley either, unless, indeed, he wishes to visit the Druid's Altar.

The Aire then, just opposite the fine old Hall of Riddlesden, makes a sharp bend, and completely deserts its original bed. The local gossips maintain that the river thus changed its course in the seventeenth century, to mark its indignation at the infamous treachery by which the lawyers of York contrived to despoil John Murgatroyd, the master of Riddlesden, of his inheritance.

Calverley Hall, at the next curve of the river, is a charming old homestead, stained, though, by the memory of a ghastly tragedy. It has suffered little by the wear and tear of time, and is now used as a farmhouse. But, in the days of the Tudors, it was a mansion of importance, and the home of a well-known family of Yorkshire gentleness. Walter Calverley, the owner of the Hall at the beginning of the seventeenth century, was a man much respected in the county; he was the husband of a gentle, loving wife, and the father of three children. One day, returning home from the hunt in a state of wild fury, he murdered two of his children, stabbed his wife, and, leaving her for dead, started off in search of his youngest child, that it might share the fate of the others. He was seized, however, before he could accomplish his fourth crime, and was brought to trial at York, where he coolly defended what he had done, maintaining that the law of God, if not of man, allowed him to punish in his own way an unfaithful wife, and to rid himself, as seemed to him best, of children that were none of his. The judges, however, refused to admit this interpretation of the rights of a husband and father, and Walter Calverley was executed in the Castle at York. This episode furnished the subject of the "Yorkshire Tragedy," a play which was very popular during the reign of Elizabeth. Shakespeare's name was attached to the first edition that was printed; but, judging by its language, it was written before his time.

Within an easy walk of Calverley is Kirkstall Abbey, which, like most of our mediæval buildings, owes its foundation to the feeling expressed by the old adage: "When the devil was sick, the devil a

saint would be." Henry de Lacy, Baron of Pontefract, one of the worst men of his lawless age, was, about the middle of the twelfth century, seized with a severe illness; and, in his abject fear of the death that seemed to be at hand, he vowed that if he recovered he would build an Abbey for the Cistercian monks. He did recover, and, for a wonder, kept his vow. Kirkstall Abbey is built just below the rocky gorge of Bramley, in one of those little cloughs that shoot off from the side of the Aire. It is beautifully placed, the high hills behind it, and the river in front, cutting it from the noise and confusion of the manufacturing town that lies so near. The monks of Kirkstall were never favourites with their neighbours, who took a keen delight in destroying the fish, and burning the granaries of the hated De Lacy's protégés. When Ralph Hageth was abbot, the feeling against the order ran so high that the Abbey was kept in a state of semi-siege. Nor was it only with the people of his county that Ralph Hageth was unpopular; by his indiscreet championship of Queen Eleanor's wrongs, he excited the wrath of Henry the Second, and was obliged to steal a golden chalice and a text of the Gospels from the Abbey treasury, as a bribe to gain the pardon of the King.

The monks from the first seem to have led a luxurious, lawless existence, carrying on a petty warfare with all who were less powerful than themselves; so there was open rejoicing in the neighbourhood when, one dark November day, in 1540, Royal Commissioners appeared and drove them from the Abbey. Kirkstall was given to Archbishop Cranmer, but it has changed hands several times since his day, and was again offered for sale last autumn.

The mills and dye-works, four miles down the stream, effectually destroy the silvery brightness of the "lithe Aire." Was ever river so black and noisome as that which flows past Leeds? Malham Tarn would scorn to own its offspring if it could see it here. The Aire, however, soon shakes off its diabolic hue and, by the time it reaches Templenewsam, has again assumed a Christian-like appearance.

Templenewsam was, for years, the home of the Knights-Templars; and, if all tales be true, strange scenes of fiendish revelry have been enacted there. The original building was one of great beauty; but, it having fallen into decay, unfortunately a modern mansion, of no great architectural

charm, has been built upon the old site. A little further to the south is Swillington Hall, the home of the Lowthers. Then comes Castleford, with its Roman remains, where the Calder joins the Aire. Wakefield stands on the Calder. Its old church, or rather cathedral, is the most perfect specimen we have of the Perpendicular style. It was built to commemorate the memory of the Duke of York, and those of his followers who were slain at Wakefield, in that most fatal of all the battles in the great struggle of the Roses. Quite close to the town is the ruin of Sandal Castle, which preserves the memory of a devoted, though illicit, attachment. The last Earl of Warren was, when quite a boy, betrothed to Maud de Nerford, but Edward the First forbade the marriage, and forced him to take another bride, Joan de Barr, a member of the Royal family. This union proved a most unhappy one, and the Earl sought consolation for the coldness and ill-temper of his wife in the society of Maud de Nerford, whom he still passionately loved. He built Sandal Castle, and gave it to Maud as a provision for her and her two sons. As they both died without issue, the Castle lapsed to the Crown.

Pontefract is the next place of interest in the valley of the Aire. Even in the Saxon days Pontefract, then called Kirby, was a town of importance; up to the Conquest it was a Royal manor; but William gave it to Hildebert de Lacy, who at once built on an elevated rock at the side of the town, a castle, so impregnable by its position, and the strength of its walls, that, in the middle ages, it was counted one of the strongest castles in England, and could only be taken by blockade. By the marriage of its heiress, Pontefract passed into the hands of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, the man who seized Piers Gaveston and put him to death. Whilst attempting to do the same for the De Spensers, Earl Thomas was himself taken prisoner at Boroughbridge, and, by order of Edward the Second, put to a cruel and ignominious death. The northern peasantry venerated him as a saint and a martyr; they even pretended that miracles were wrought on his tomb, and so worked upon the feelings of Edward the Third, the son of the man who had put him to death, that he induced the Pope to canonise the popular hero.

Richard the Second, the one King, perhaps, who suffered rather for his virtues than his vices—although the name of these

was legion—met with his death at Pontefract.

Here the Court was held which, casting aside all superstitious reverence for episcopal consecration, condemned Archbishop Scroop to a traitor's death; here, too, the Earl of Rivers, Lord Grey, and Sir Thomas Vaughan were murdered, that the third Richard might reign. The Castle was the scene of the fiercest struggle during the Civil Wars. It was besieged by Sir Thomas Fairfax, in August, 1644; in January, 1645, the siege was raised in consequence of the defeat of the Parliamentarians by the Royalists. Then it was besieged for the second time, and the town was taken by storm; and, some two months later, the Castle was forced by famine to capitulate. The Royalists were allowed to withdraw with all the honours of war, and the Castle was left in the charge of a Colonel Cotterell, with a guard of only one hundred men. Before a week had passed, some Royalists, disguising themselves as workmen, gained admittance into the citadel under the pretence of fitting up beds for the soldiers; and, after a hard fight, won back the Castle for the King. Little wonder the Parliamentarians were wroth, for their work had to be done over again. Cromwell, himself, came to direct the siege in October, 1648; but, finding the task too tedious for his taste, he left it to Lambert.

The brave little garrison in the Castle met the announcement of the King's death by promptly proclaiming Charles the Second; but, after making unheard-of efforts to cut their way through the army that surrounded them, on March the twenty-fifth, 1649, the Royalists were obliged to capitulate, not, however, before they had won the hearty admiration of their foes by their heroic defence. By order of the Parliament, Pontefract Castle was completely dismantled.

The Aire, by this time, has ceased to exist as a separate river, and flows on with the Calder past Ferry Bridge—the scene of more than one hard fight—and Frystone, where the late Lord Houghton stored his precious collection of books and manuscripts; and then it joins the Ouse.

You can scarcely wander for a mile on the banks of the Aire without passing some pleasant homestead, stately castle, or ruined Abbey, each with its own quaint legend or historic record. Why, then, is Airedale so neglected and despised?

SOMETHING ABOUT THE KARENS.

THERE have been so many unfortunate, and disagreeable, and regrettable things in connection with our annexation of Upper Burmah, that whatever pleasant features there are should have full prominence. And one of the most pleasant features has been the remarkable loyalty to the British Crown of the little nation of Karens. It is a nation almost unknown at home here, and is frequently misunderstood and misrepresented, even in India; but it is one with such marked idiosyncrasies and of such peculiar suggestiveness, that we have thought it would be of interest to our readers to set before them a few facts which we have collected from various sources, and especially from a little book published, not very long ago, by Mr. D. M. Smeaton, of the Bengal Civil Service.

In Sir Roper Lethbridge's excellent short "History of India," the Karens are disposed of in a couple of lines, as a "distinct tribe, interesting on account of the remarkable progress Christianity has made among them."

In Dr. (now Sir W. W.) Hunter's "Indian Empire," they are mentioned as a tribe "whose traditions have a singularly Jewish tinge," and who numbered, in 1872, about three hundred and thirty thousand, and in 1881, five hundred and eighteen thousand three hundred. If these numbers are at all approximating the facts, they represent a wonderful amount of vitality in the small nation. Their loyalty and courage have been in refreshing contrast to the dacoity and unfaithfulness of the Burmese, with whom they will not assimilate on any terms. Organised and led by missionaries they have rendered signal service to the British Government, which, there is reason to fear, has received only scurvy acknowledgement in official quarters, and is not even known at all at home.

To understand the devotion of the Karens to the Government of the Empress-Queen, we must understand their religion, and to do that we must inquire a little into their origin. They are a people who cling most tenaciously to their national traditions, and who have a deeply-rooted antipathy to the Burmese—the product of long and grievous oppression.

It has been sometimes supposed that the Karens are the aborigines of Burmah; but to this supposition their traditions are

wholly opposed. These tell of a "river of running sand," which they had to cross with much tribulation before they reached their present habitats.

Now, a Chinese traveller, who visited India in the fifth century, described the great desert in the north of Burmah, and between China and Thibet, as a "river of sand," and in the Chinese map of India to this day, this large tract is still marked "quicksands."

Karen tradition describes this same region as "a fearful trackless region, where the sands roll before the wind like the waves of the sea."

From these and other evidences, then, it is supposed that the Karens are a people who dwelt originally on the borders of Thibet, who crossed the Gobi Desert into China, and thence found their way gradually down into Burmah. Why they migrated, and when they first came to Burmah, remains a mystery. The first mention of them by European travellers is about 1740, when an Italian missionary found "wild populations called Cariani, living separate from others and in full liberty." But they had been there for many generations before that, and were commonly looked upon as savages.

Savages, however, they were not, for they had imbibed from the Jewish colony in Western China, all the "traditions of their elders," and a wonderful faith in a coming Messiah, of which more anon. There are three branches of the Karen nation: the Chghaws (pronounced Sgaws), or male branch; the Pghos (pronounced Pwos), or female branch; and the Bghai, or Red Karens. The Pghos were the first to enter Burmah, driven out of China by a feud with their kinsmen the Chghaws, and wandered down the Salween River to settle finally on the deltas of the great rivers, and along the seaboard from Mergui to Moulmein, near which last place, at Dongyan, they still have their headquarters and stronghold. The Chghaws, after driving the Pghos to the sea, themselves occupied the Pegu Joma hills, and afterwards the hills and jungles of the Irrawaddy district. There are also offshoots of both branches in Siam, about the valleys of Cambodia. The Bghai branch came last, and settled along the Toungoo hills. These are the Red Karens, the most warlike of the whole, and the only tribe which was able to resist Burmese aggression, and to preserve its independence. This they still retain, paying a

small annual tribute to the British Government, and living under the rule of their own chiefs. There is an offshoot of the Bghai branch in Lower Burmah, known to the hillmen as the "trouser-wearing Bghai." Inter-marriage between the three tribes is not frequent; but there is perfect friendship and freedom of intercourse between them.

Their language is monosyllabic, with open syllables and no final consonants. It belongs to the "Tonal family" of languages, and has no affinity with that of the Burmese. Indeed, it belongs to the same family as the Chinese, but must have separated ages ago. It has no written characters, and the Karens have no written literature; but they have a rich "bard literature" which has been transmitted orally from generation to generation, and which perpetuates traditions, legends, folklore, heroic songs, and moral precepts.

The most important of their traditions, preserved with the greatest exactitude of narration, is the story of God's dealings with the nation. Their accounts of the Creation, the Fall, the Curse, and the dispersion of men, are startling in their resemblance to the Mosaic records.

The Karens believe that the sun, moon, and stars revolve round the earth, over and under. Underneath, there is another world, to which people go when they die. It has the same sun and moon as we have, but the day and night are reversed; and here, in a sort of intermediate state, live the dead, employed much as they were on earth. It is not difficult in this to see the Jewish idea of Sheol; and again, they have a tradition that after the world is burned up, God will come and raise men to life again, when "the lazy shall become dogs, but the industrious, men." Something of the future state, and the Great Promise, is also revealed in the following song:

Good persons, the good,
Shall go to the silver town, the silver city;
Righteous persons, the righteous,
Shall go to the new town, the new city;
Persons that believe their father and mother
Shall enjoy the golden palace.
When the Karen King arrives,
There will be only one monarch;
When the Karen King comes,
There will be neither rich nor poor;
When the Karen King shall arrive,
There will be neither rich man nor poor;
When the Karen King shall come,
Rich and poor will not exist,

and the animals will all be at peace, and shall cease to fight with and devour each other.

The religion of the Karens is essentially monotheistic; they abhor idolatry, and hold Buddhism in contempt. But God, they say, deserted them long ago because of their sins, and left them to the persecution of the demons, who are invisible, but who fill the world and cause sickness, death, and all manner of misfortune; every living thing has its spirit (La), and every inanimate object its "lord," so that all nature is full of mischief and danger. They say, illustrating the position by a parable of some children appeasing a tiger with little pigs while anxiously looking for their father with his bow and arrow to deliver them: "We must throw sops to the foul demons who afflict us, but our hearts are ever looking for God."

But now we come to the most remarkable tradition of all, held absolutely identical by each tribe of the Karens, and enabling us to understand the success which the American missionaries have had among them, and their devotion to the British alliance. After the Fall, they say, God gave His "Word" (the Bible) to the Karens first, as the elder branch of the human race; but they neglected it, and God, in anger, took it away and gave it to their younger brother, the white man, who was placed under a promise to restore it to the Karens, and teach them the true religion after their sins had been sufficiently expiated by long oppression of other races. For some hundreds of years the Karens have been longing for the fulfilment of this prophecy, and therefore they hailed the advent of the white missionaries with joy. The whole nation is becoming gradually, nay rapidly, Christianised, and yet without losing its individuality. A Karen who becomes a Christian does not cease to be a Karen—does not lose his place and influence in the clan; he still submits to the ruling of the Elders. Hence it is probable that a distinct Karen-Christian Church may be the outcome of the movement now in progress. At any rate, it is sufficiently significant that the cause of Christianity should have among the Karens this altogether peculiar advantage, that those still remaining "heathen" (and they are yet of course the majority) dwell in perfect amity with, and even approve and encourage the converts, though themselves held back chiefly by their lingering demon-worship. In such conditions—if they are correctly reported—it seems only a matter of time till the whole Karen nation embraces Christianity; and with

proper protection under the British Government, that little nation will assuredly grow apace, and take a high, possibly a commanding, place among the polyglot races which are already replacing the effete Burmese, and may conceivably form the nucleus of a one-day powerful Christian force in the East.

We should mention that the Red Karen tribe claims superiority over the others from their possession of certain metal plates containing part of the original Word given to them by God. They acknowledge that they sinned equally with the other tribes in losing the knowledge of reading and writing; but that because they have preserved and treat with reverence these plates, God will be more merciful to them than to the others. The Red Karens, as we have said, have always preserved their independence, and attribute their ability to have done so to the possession of these plates, which they guard with jealous care. Copies have been taken of the inscriptions and shown to Oriental scholars; but no one, we believe, has yet succeeded in deciphering them.

To account for the curious religious traditions of the Karens, a theory has been started that they are one of "the lost tribes;" but then, as this theory has been applied to almost every race under the sun, it is not of much value. Of more probability is the belief that before coming to Burmah, the Karens had lived in active intercourse with, and had imbibed the traditions of, the Nestorian Jews, who found their way from Armenia to Western China early in the Middle Ages, and must have settled there before the quarrels and separation of the Karen tribes began.

As to their national customs, these are undergoing some change. Infant marriage, for instance, is becoming much less frequent, and polygamy is not permitted. The Red Karens have a curious marriage ceremony:

"The two young people having made up their minds to marry, and the parents having given their consent, the bridegroom makes a feast in his house, to which the bride and some female companions come. During the feast, the bridegroom presents a cup of spirits to the bride, saying, 'Is it agreeable?' This she takes, replying, 'It is agreeable.' She and her companions remain all night, and returning home next morning, prepare a feast, to which the bridegroom and his friends come, and the ceremony of presenting the cup of spirits

is again gone through, this time the bride being the questioner. Occasionally the reply given playfully is, 'Not agreeable,' when the spirits must be offered and the question repeated till a favourable answer is received. The feast in the bride's house completes the whole ceremony."

The children are sometimes named after their ancestors; but the names given are often descriptive only of the parents' feelings, as "Joy" and "Hope;" or commemorative of a period, as "Harvest;" or marking an event, as "Father returned;" or noting some physical peculiarity, as "White," or "Black;" or sometimes after a bird, or beast, or material, as "Heron," "Tiger," "Tin," and "Cotton." The parents frequently change their own names on the birth of a child.

In ordinary cases of sickness, the Karens are kind and attentive enough to those afflicted; but in the case of an infectious disease, they are very rigorous, holding the person supposed to have introduced small-pox or cholera into a village responsible for all the deaths, and liable to pay the money-value of them. If he cannot do it himself, the debt descends upon his children and grandchildren until wiped out.

In the old days they never declared war. They sought rather to take their enemy unawares.

When an expedition began, it was held to have closed the door to peaceful mediation or explanation, and it was equally invariable for the conquerors to exterminate the vanquished with barbaric cruelty:

"All the men were killed, whether armed or unarmed. Such women as were thought likely to be useful or profitable as slaves were taken and bound. All the rest were killed. Infants were always killed, and children were often barbarously massacred. Their hands and feet were cut off, and their bodies hacked into small pieces."

Nor is this the only trait of cruelty in the national character. Slavery still exists among some of the tribes, and one of the Bghai clans is said even to sell their relatives. Defaulting debtors, captives in forays, confirmed thieves, widows and widowers who cannot pay the price of the deceased, were invariably, and are still, we understand, occasionally sold into slavery. For old men and women, there is no "market," but middle-aged men and women are or were valued at from two to three hundred rupees, and boys and girls

at from three to four hundred rupees each.

The Karens are not traders like the Burmese, but essentially agriculturists. When they settle on the plains their paddy-fields always surpass those of the Burmese, and their villages always have a greater look of prosperity. In the hill settlements, they cut down and burn the trees, and sow their crops on the mixed soil and ashes. The following year they move on to another hillside and repeat the operation, leaving the first clearing for six or seven years to recover its natural vegetation, when they return to it. Thus they are continually moving from hill to hill, the period of migration being usually seven years, when they come back to the starting-point and begin afresh. After the first rain-falls in May or June, rice is sown by dropping seed into holes dibbled in the ground, and when the rice is well up, cotton, maize, and capsicum are sown between the ridges. Sugar-cane, yams, and betel are planted near the house, and in the middle of the cultivated patch, called the "tomagya," a little hut is built, in which a boy or girl is placed, to frighten away the birds and wild pigs.

Threshing is done by beating the ears against a beam of wood, or by treading out the grains with the feet. The Karens have no cattle, and while the crops are growing the men and women fish and hunt, and gather forest produce for subsistence.

After the harvest is gathered, the "paddy" is stored in a granary, and paterfamilias goes down with his wife to the plains to sell his betel, and fowls, and what wild honey, beeswax, etc., he may have gathered, to obtain money wherewith to buy clothes and pay taxes. In some parts tobacco is extensively grown, and is a profitable crop.

Some of the folk-tales of the Karens are very racy, but the best of them are hardly suited for these pages. Animals figure largely in them, and the hare appears usually as the embodiment of wisdom and cunning. But the hare gets circumvented at last. The following is suggestive of an Old-World fable:

THE HARE AND THE SNAIL.

"The hare was rendered so vain by his many victories over the beasts of the forest, that he began to tyrannise over the weaker animals. Thence began to date

his defeat. He specially abused the snails, until they laid a complaint before their King, and asked relief. The snail-king was very angry, and asked the hare what he meant by so injuring his subjects.

"What are you good for, that you should challenge my right?" asked the hare.

"I'm good at running races," said the snail-king.

"And forthwith a race was arranged, much to the amusement of the hare.

"The snail stipulated that, as he was an aquatic animal, he should run in the creek, while the hare ran along the shore to the mouth, which was to be the goal. The course was fixed, and the match arranged for the next morning. In the night the snail-king stationed one of his subjects at each bend of the river, and had another at the goal. Then at the proper time he went himself to the starting-place. The word 'Go!' was given; the snail-king jumped into the river, and the hare trotted off at a gentle pace, cock-sure of victory. At the first bend of the river he shouted, 'Halloa, snail!' and far ahead the reply came back: 'Here!'

"Well, that fellow runs well," thought the hare, and redoubled his exertions. But at each bend, when he called out, always a voice far ahead responded, 'Here!' And when he arrived at the goal, a snail was quietly nibbling away at the flowers which marked the spot. The hare never doubted that the snail he saw at the finish was the one with whom he started, not remembering that all snails are very much alike. But the hare was never beaten until he began to oppress the poor; so long as he cheated tigers and elephants he was all right."

But here is an instance of Master Hare's wisdom:

THE HARE AND THE KING.

"A certain King was so proud, that he became almost unendurable to his subjects. So the hare went to rebuke him. He went into the Court, and called out:

"Hey, you fellow! who are you, anyway?"

"I am the King," was the answer.

"Well," said the hare, 'I am only a jungle beast and don't know what King means.'

"A King is one who has nothing above him," was the reply.

"Well, I declare," said the hare. 'Is there nothing above you?'

"Nothing," replied the King.

"Well, I never saw a man with nothing above him before, and I want to take a good look at you."

"Look your fill," replied the King.

The hare stared at the King for hours, until the King became so hungry that he could not sit longer and got up to leave the Court quietly. But the hare called out: 'Hey, you King, where are you going to?'

The King, ashamed, sat down again and resumed his business. This went on several times until the King could hold out no longer, and shouted: 'If you must know, I am going to get something to eat.'

"Ah! you're no King," said the hare. 'Your own stomach is your master. It demands food and you are powerless to resist.'

"Then he went on to show the King that sickness, old age, and death, were all above him, and that he must obey them, and that therefore by his own definition only God is King.

"But the hare came to grief at last. One day he saw a black and a white buffalo grazing peacefully together in a large plain. He went to the black one and told him that the white one had said: 'That black buffalo eats so much, I shall be starved.' He then went to the white one and reported that the black buffalo had said: 'That white buffalo eats so much that I shall be starved.'

"In this way he raised a fight, and while the beasts were going each other, he kept skipping from the head of one to the other urging them to greater fury. But in his excitement, the hare missed his footing just as the two heads were meeting in a grand crash, and he was crushed to death.

"And thus," says the story, "even wisdom and cunning, like that of the hare, will not save a mischief-maker."

The hares, it is said, multiplied so rapidly at one time, that they filled all Pegu, and such was the dread of the marvellous cunning of their progenitor, that neither animals nor men dared to live in the district. But when the descendants of Taw-mai-pah—the mythical ancestor of all the Karen clans—began to find the Toungoo hills too confined for them, a proposal was made that they should colonise Pegu. A wise man undertook to get rid of the hares. He went to Pegu on a pretended visit, and in the course of conversation with the hares, said:

"It's strange that you should all hang together so well. Your progenitor, single-handed, conquered all the beasts by his cunning; are you less wise, that you are forced to unite yourselves so closely? Why don't you live each by his own plot of grass, and each trust to his own individual cunning?"

This roused the pride of the hares, and they set up their own separate circles. Then the men and beasts came and attacked them, and lived for years on their flesh until not a hare remains to-day in Pegu. Moral: "Disunion means defeat."

Now disunion means a great deal among the Karens, who have been rendered both reticent and suspicious by long ages of oppression. They are excessively clannish, but when once their confidence is won, they yield implicit trust.

The Hill Karens will obey only one man, whether their chief or their official superior, if they are in the police or other service, and will not receive orders except directly from him. This little peculiarity sometimes leads to a great deal of trouble. And when a Karen does break away from his tribe to lead a roving life, he is rather a dangerous fellow; and if he becomes a dacoit, is much more to be dreaded than a Burman dacoit. For he has a perfect knowledge of jungle life, and can follow a trail, or conceal his own, with as much skill and cunning as an American Indian. Indeed, as a race, the Karens are rather given to concealment than to display, by which, however, we do not mean that deceit is a natural characteristic. They are exceedingly hospitable, and will entertain strangers with courtesy and lavish generosity, which seems curious considering the general suspiciousness of their character.

The Karens are not openly passionate; but they carry resentment for long, and their quarrels are much more irreconcilable than if they were more open. If a Government officer offends them, they say nothing to him, but pass the word round the tribes that So-and-So is "no friend" to Karen. This is never forgotten, and the officer will never again get any help from the clan.

To the Burmans, however, they are always hostile, and Karen mothers will silence their children by saying: "A Burman is coming," just as foolish nurses do among us with the "bogy-man."

The chieftainship of a Karen village is usually hereditary; but is often decided by personal merit. The village is the

"federate unit," and among some of the clans it may be simply a big barrack capable of accommodating up to a hundred families. In such a case there will be one long central hall, with separate suites of rooms opening off it—two rooms and an open verandah for each family. In the plains, however, each family has its separate dwelling.

In stature, the Karens are small, but they are broad and muscular, and strangely enough, the dwellers on the plains are more robust than the hillmen. Their skin is fair, like that of the Chinese; their hair is straight and long; their eyes usually black; and the features Circassian in type. Their dress varies. Striped tunics are worn by some of the clans; some wear handsomely embroidered trousers, and some wear none at all; a few go almost naked.

The Red Karens wear short red trousers, with narrow black or white stripes; black bands of twisted thread round the legs; a white wrapper with red or black stripes round the body; and a bright red turban on the head. The female dress of the Red Karens is also very picturesque, consisting mainly of a cloth worn like a Roman toga, falling over a coloured petticoat, and with a high red or black turban, twisted up in the form of a small tower. They are all fond of music, and sing beautifully, wild plaintive airs which are said to resemble those of the Scotch and Welsh Highlanders.

The American missionaries have been at work among the Karens for nearly sixty years, and the secret of their remarkable success is said to be that the movement of the Karens towards Christianity has been a national one—a general uprising of the people themselves to realise the tradition of ages. It is very curious altogether, and probably in no other part of the world have Christian missions been so quickly and uniformly successful. The idea is gaining ground through all the tribes that the day of hope for their race has dawned; and they are making wonderful pecuniary sacrifices in the cause of religion and education. As regards this last, it is related that when some of the Hill Karens lately captured a Burmese rebel, for whom the Government had offered a reward of five thousand rupees, it was put to the vote among the villagers what should be done with the money, and without a dissentient voice it was resolved to give it to the schools which they said, "had made men of them."

Well, now, we do not wish it to be supposed that the whole of the Karen nation have yet reached this high standard. But a large proportion have, and the tendency of the whole of the clans is in the same direction. It is clear, then, that a nation with such characteristics as we have shown, with such traditions, and with such aspirations, is destined to take a high place in the future of our Indian Empire.

Unfortunately, if Mr. Smeaton and others are to be believed, our Government have not been fully alive to the quality and potentiality of these people.

It is often said of the European residents in India, that their loyalty to the British Crown is beyond question, because their very existence in the country depends on the maintenance of the British Government; and so, in a lesser degree, it may be said the loyalty of the Karens, aliens like ourselves in the midst of a hostile and cruel people, may be relied on, since self-interest, to take no higher view, binds them to the British Government. This, and the manner in which they have stood by us in our recent operations in Burmah, will, it is to be hoped, be now fully recognised; and we trust that, in the future, more consideration may be shown to them. Their principal grievance, and it is one which calls for immediate redress, is that they are practically governed by subordinate officials of the hated Burmese race; and they demand, and Mr. Smeaton and the American missionaries urge with perhaps rather injudicious warmth: firstly, that recruits from the Karen people themselves should be more largely admitted to the subordinate Government service, and that Karen officials should be posted to Karen districts; secondly, that the superior officials, European or Burmese, employed in Karen districts, should be compelled to acquire the Karen language; and lastly and chiefly, that the Karens should be accorded some measure of local self-government. The first two of these demands are so reasonable as to be imperative; and, as to the last, this is hardly the place to discuss it. If it be the case that the Karens believe that the British Government, while just to all, does not care for them, and prefers the Burmans, then every effort should surely be made to remove such an impression, and to ally with us in heart, as they are in sympathy, the very remarkable people of whom we have endeavoured to give a brief, but inadequate description.

THE SECRET OF MADDON.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

EVERY one who saw it for the first time said that it was a lovely place; and even those, to whom it was a familiar landmark in the scene, owned that a more charming country seat than Maddon Court could hardly be found among the southern counties of England.

It was not so much the house as its situation; in fact, take away from it its wooded background and surroundings of magnificent trees, or its position on the green sloping hillside, and you had nothing but a long, low, irregular, white building, with many chimney-pots, in which successive generations had added a window here, thrown out a wing there, and committed the crowning incongruity of erecting an Italian portico in front of the old Tudor mansion.

In the foreground, a green undulating glade, marked here and there by a few scattered giants of oak and elm, left the view of the house open to the roadway, which on leaving its gates wound on for another half-mile or so, until it reached the village of Maddon, which derived its name from the Court, and in whose ancient church of Saint Mary, the founders of the family, the knights and dames of the house of Halliwell, lay in sculptured state. For the Halliwells had been lords of Maddon for centuries; and to the bucolic mind the possibility of there ever being a time when there should cease to be a Halliwell at the Court, was one of those things which it was impossible to conceive.

It was reported by those who pretended to familiarity with the family archives, that once the family possessions had been in imminent danger of passing away from them altogether in the time of Sir Jonas.

For the Halliwells were one of those fine old families who had been all things to all men. They had been to the Crusades in the earlier portion of their history; had been burnt at Smithfield as heretics, later on under Mary the Sanguineous; had melted their plate, to the last mustard-pot, for King and country, during the Civil War, and had gambled recklessly with what remained of their property under the Restoration.

Sir Jonas Halliwell had been one of the wildest and wickedest spirits of the Second Charles's Court—a boon companion of Rochester and De Gramont—and it was

said, that, having lost all his available possessions at the gaming-table, he had been about to stake his inheritance on the fortunes of the dice-box, when, as he raised his hand to make the cast, he was stricken by the plague in its most malignant form, and died hideously in less than two hours, forsaken by all, alternately cursing his luck and uttering horrible blasphemies among the ruins of overturned card-tables and broken wine flasks, with the smoky light of guttering tallow candles to illumine his death agony.

His picture, painted by Sir Peter Lely, hangs among the rest of the family portraits in the picture gallery of Maddon Court, and shows a dark, handsome, but sinister-looking individual of elegant figure, arrayed with all the costly magnificence of the time, in a suit of carnation-coloured velvet, with a cloak of the same embroidered in gold and lined with white satin, hanging from one shoulder, ruffles of the finest Mechlin, and a plumed hat, looped with an emerald clasp upon his head.

This portrait, which was completed but a short time before his death, and bears the date "1665," represents him as wearing an evil-looking smile on his countenance, and standing in a negligent attitude, with one hand on his silver-hilted sword, and it is reported that it was thus attired in this identical costume that he met his death, and was overtaken by his awful end.

There is no tomb or tablet to his memory in the church at Maddon, for his body, denuded of its rich trappings, was cast into the great pit at Finsbury Fields. The ruthless and inhuman robbers, who were one of the most terrible pests of that dreadful time, had not feared to strip the scarcely cold corpse of its bravery of apparel; but, being disturbed in their impious task by the watch, they fled, leaving their booty behind them. What became of the gold-embroidered suit of carnation-coloured velvet, the satin-lined laced cloak, and the jewel-clasped feathered hat, was not known—whether it was taken possession of by the myrmidons of the law, or became the property of the dead man's servant—but there was a certain heavily-carved, iron-bound chest in a dusty, disused upper chamber in the oldest portion of Maddon Court, the secret of whose spring was unknown, and which had never been opened since it had been brought there by Sir Reginald Halliwell, brother and successor of Sir Jonas.

What it contained no one knew;

perhaps the evidences of some hidden crime—some horrible, grisly tokens of a cruel murder—something which, had it been known, would have blasted the fair fame of Maddon, and perhaps—for there were many surmises—nothing at all; but on the lid was carved, in old English characters, the following distich:

Who opes this cheste,
Shall curse hys queste.

The door of the chamber was always locked, and the heavy, rusty old key bore a parchment label, on which was inscribed "The Closed Room." Strange to say, no Halliwell had ever been found sufficiently curious to brave the curse and raise the lid. One reason was that they were a superstitious race, and guarded jealously all their family traditions—another, that, hidden away in an otherwise empty cobweb-hung and seldom-entered chamber, it proved the truth of the old adage, "Out of sight is out of mind," and probably, from one year's end to another, its mysterious presence was scarcely remembered; but, no doubt, its chief safeguard lay in the secret of its lock, which was sufficient of itself, without the aid of superstition, to baffle all would-be sacrilegious hands, the boldest of which would have shrunk from the employment of force in such a case. And so the old oak chest kept its secret—if it had one—well!

It was universally admitted, that, to view Maddon at its best, you must visit it in the autumn, when the September sun was setting behind its background of hills, and the first finger of decay was passing over its woods and copses, touching them lightly, and painting them crimson, and brown, and golden, with the inimitable tints taken from Nature's own palette. If ever Maddon Court was beautiful—and all allowed that it was so—it was beautiful then; more beautiful even than in the early spring-time, when buds were shooting and leaves unfolding day by day, or in the winter, when snow covered and hid the green slopes, and icicles hung from the branches. And it was on a September day, early in the present century, when the place was fairest to look upon, that Sir Hugh Halliwell brought home his bride.

She was, it had been reported, of Spanish lineage, and Sir Hugh had met her, and fallen a victim to her charms while seeking distraction and forgetfulness, after the death of his first wife, in foreign travel. But who she was and whence she came,

beyond the mere circumstance of her being of foreign extraction—though she spoke English well enough—was not and never was known.

People, who had pitied the bereaved man in the first flush and outbreak of his grief, exclaimed in wonder and contempt when they heard of the brevity of its duration. That is, they wondered until they saw the new Lady Halliwell, and then they, or at any rate the masculine portion of the community, wondered no more, but attested their conviction as to the bridegroom's good fortune and taste, and confirmed it with the many oaths of the period. Their wives and daughters certainly deemed it only becoming on their part to throw up their hands in scandalised amazement at the fickleness of men generally, and the unseemliness of a widower, whose tears should scarcely have dried upon his cheeks, marrying again in less than three months; yet even they—though grudgingly and with a sigh and shake of their head as a token of respect, on their part, at any rate, to the departed—allowed that Lady Isabella was vastly handsome, with a most elegant shape, and the manners of a Princess of the Royal blood—but—

Somehow, there was always a "but" when her own sex spoke of the second Lady Halliwell. Female prejudice, of course—what else could it be, seeing that there was not one of their number in the whole county who could hold a candle to her in respect of personal appearance or elegance of manner?

But on that same September day, when Lady Halliwell saw her future home for the first time, bathed in sunshine and standing proudly on its wooded eminence, the expression which crossed her face, after her first exclamation of pleasure, was but a gloomy one, suggestive of envy and discontent with her lot; for there was already an heir to this fair domain. The first wife, who had died, had left behind her a son, and, consequently, no child of hers might hope to inherit the estate and reign at Maddon in the time to come.

She was only the second wife, and, with all her pride and beauty, of less consequence than a sickly baby. "And those sickly babies so seldom die!" she reflected bitterly.

For the young heir was a weakly child, though, thanks to the care of his faithful nurse and the pure country air, he grew to be a stout enough youth. It was scarcely

to be wondered at, that this trusty nurse, Deborah Brand, who had been his father's nurse before his, should nourish unfavourable and hostile thoughts towards the "New Madame," after the manner of most old retainers, who consider it their duty to look upon a step-mother, whatever her character or conduct, as a supplanter and intruder—particularly one with such black brows and haughty airs, who was known to be a "Papisher."

She watched over her young charge with a vigilance which was practically unsleeping, and which she never relaxed until he was of sufficient age to be deemed capable of taking heed to his own ways. Never, unless it was impossible to avoid so doing, would she leave the young heir alone with his step-mother, and never—after the time when, as a mere baby, he narrowly escaped being drowned in the old fish-pond, through, as Deborah declared and maintained, that lady's negligence—would she let him out of her sight.

The sweetmeats, too, which Lady Isabella, no doubt desirous of winning his childish confidence and infantile affections, gave him from her own "bonbonnière," were, if possible, ruthlessly confiscated, notwithstanding the prolonged and anguished howls of the despoiled one. She declared the "nasty foreign muck" made the child ill; and, indeed, on one occasion, the child was very sick after having partaken of his step-mother's bounty.

In vain the latter carried complaints of the nurse's insolence and overbearing conduct to Sir Hugh, and demanded that she should be dismissed, and one of her ladyship's own choosing installed in her stead. In this matter, and in this only, Sir Hugh was adamant, and equally impervious to smiles or tears, caresses or vituperation. He had promised the child's dead mother that the faithful Deborah, to whose arms she had committed him, as her own grew too feeble, should never be sent away or deprived of her post, so long as the boy required her services.

This he had sworn, and would abide by his oath, come what would, though in every other matter his lady might and should have her undisputed way.

So Deborah remained, and the young Reginald grew apace, and thrived amazingly under her fostering care. In course of time a baby-brother was born to him, who soon became the one object of his mother's existence, and the centre and sole possessor of her affections; though, with his birth,

the growing expression of envious discontent, which sullied her handsome features, increased and culminated.

By this time the "young master," as the old servants of the household delighted to call him, was a sturdy young urchin of some three or four years. It was this last expression which, when she heard it, made his step-mother's eyes flash fire, and caused her to bite her full red lips until they bled. "He!" she would mutter fiercely to herself; "that little interloper!"—which was hard on Reginald, and, to say the least, unreasonable, seeing that he was the firstborn—"who is not to be named with my son, my Anthony. But he shall never lord it over me and mine when his father dies. Poor weak fool! but for him and his pitiful vow, I could have sent away that hateful woman, with her prying eyes and insolent speeches, and then who knows but that things might even then have come right!"

He was a handsome child, this second son of Sir Hugh, but as dark as a gipsy; and his father was proud enough of him, though his affection was as nothing when compared with the strength and fierceness of the passion which his mother bore to him. Even jealous old Deborah admitted that he was a "likely enough child, but as dark as a nigger, and, Heaven knows, no more to be compared to my young master, with his bonny blue eyes, and good English face, than I am with her leddyship! Still, it's a bonny boy, too, if he wasna so black; and his mother knows better than to ruin his stomach with the nasty, foreign confections and messes she used to carry about with her in her silver box, and which always made my young master so qualmish when he eat them!"

The little heir was very fond of his small brother, and the latter, though he inherited the hot Southern blood, and fiery, uncontrolled temper of his mother, returned his affection in full; and, in spite of occasional, inevitable jealousies and disputes which ensued from time to time, the two were much attached to each other, and almost inseparable.

When both boys were considered old enough to learn to ride, each received from his father the gift of a pony. Charming little animals they were, though one of the two was credited with a spice of temper, but warranted free from vice. Naturally, the quietest pony was adjudged to the youngest lad, and "Red Rollo" became the property of Reginald. A groom, of

Lady Halliwell's own choosing, was engaged to ride out with the boys, and see that they came to no harm. Much to the disgust of the old servitors, and particularly of Deborah Brand, who was still a power in the household, in spite of all Lady Isabella could do to depose her, the man turned out to be a foreigner—a dark, sallow, sinister-looking individual; but for all that, Deborah declared, "as like my lady as two peas," and in high favour, too, with his mistress, from whose lips he received his orders every day, though from his fellow-servants he got nothing but scant courtesy and sidelong glances of suspicion. "What maggot was this," they asked each other, "that must needs set a garlic-eating, vinegar-drinking papisher like herself, behind the two young masters, as though an honest, beef-fed English lad were not good enow! Mark my words," with many a mysterious wag of the head on the part of the speaker, "something will come o't, and with such an outlandish and heathenish name, too, as Miguel—when plain Michael served the purpose of his betters!"

And something did come of it, for the new groom had not been in office a full month, when the young heir of Maddon was thrown from his pony one day, and brought home stunned and senseless. Red Rollo had taken fright at the stump of a tree or a stone in the road, the man explained in his broken English, and with his eyes fixed on his mistress's stony features, while Sir Hugh hung in speechless anguish over his son's inanimate form. But the boy, on the application of restoratives, soon revived, and proved the superior hardness of his British skull to that of the average country road; and the Lady Isabella, with old Deborah's keen, watchful, suspicious glance fixed upon her, smiled a pale, ghastly smile as he opened his eyes and looked about him; and then turning aside, she hid her face in her laced handkerchief. Kindly Sir Hugh, touched by so much emotion shown on behalf of one who was not of her own flesh and blood, spoke cheering words to her, and bade her dry her tears, "for the young rascal would yet live to lord it at the Court!"

Her maid, afterwards sent to search for the handkerchief, which her mistress had dropped, expressed her surprise to Deborah at finding it, with its cobweb lace and filmy cambric all torn and jagged as though some wild animal or "boggart" had bitten and rent it in pieces!

Red Rollo was sold, and, notwithstanding his lady's intercession on his behalf, the groom, Miguel, was discharged from his post, and bidden to take himself off the premises and return to his own place from whence he came, as he was held to blame—particularly after the discovery of the marks of heavy lashes across the pony's flanks, and which could only have come by his hand—for the accident which had occurred; which discovery would have made it hardly safe for him to have shown his swarthy face inside the stable yard. But Deborah, always on the look-out, for what she hardly knew or dared admit even in her own heart, declared that Miguel had been hidden somewhere in the neighbourhood for some time after the event thus recorded, and that my lady herself, wrapped from head to foot in one of her long cloaks and muffled about the face with a lace veil, had met him at dusk in the hazel copse "No longer ago than Wednesday sennight," and given him money—which same she could vouch for as gospel truth, as she heard the chink of it with her own ears—and had spoken to him in some foreign lingo, in which he had also replied, and then, kissing her ladyship's jewelled hand, had departed in great haste on hearing a twig snap, through a hasty movement of the listener. Deborah owned that she had followed the lady and acted as eavesdropper on this occasion, and the few trusty souls to whom she imparted the revelation, so far from condemning her for it, considered her action as deserving of the highest commendation.

CURIOSITIES OF SUICIDE.

WHAT is the most popular form of suicide? In France, drowning seems the commonest method, possibly because it is the handiest. Professor Morselli, of Turin University, tells us that drunkards and people who are tired of life and worn out with its miseries take to hanging; those to whom family misfortunes have made life unendurable choose drowning. It is perhaps not so wonderful that crossed or jealous lovers should resort to poison or the revolver. Protestants are more apt to fly to suicide than Catholics; who, again, are less impatient of life than Jews, inclined as that race is to mental alienation.

Another writer on this subject has observed that a man will, by preference, hang

himself, and a woman drown herself; and, as a national peculiarity, it may be mentioned that the percentage of those who select sharp instruments, as a means of death, is so great in England that it may be said that the English people are the greatest "cut-throats" in Europe.

Many persons, who had never before displayed great originality, have distinguished themselves by inventing novel forms of suicide. We have all heard of the Roman lady who swallowed red-hot coals; the foreign gentleman who put an end to himself with a small private guillotine also acquired posthumous renown. But perhaps the most original, though unsuccessful, would-be suicide on record is the young lady who knelt down, like a votary of Juggernaut, in front of an omnibus. A young lady "deliberately went in front of the horses of an omnibus and knelt down," according to a policeman who observed her singular conduct. On being rescued, she stated that "she wanted to be killed"; but she might have selected some method at once less prosaic and less original of gratifying her desire. Many hansom cabmen would have executed the business without even being requested to do so.

In a fiery furnace an iron-worker, at Low Moor, preferred to meet death. His fellow workmen saw him pitch himself headlong into the flames of a raging furnace; in which, no doubt, he was, before many moments had elapsed, utterly consumed. The natural question is—Why did he do it? Probably he could not tell the reason himself, if he were alive.

A pleasanter way of quitting the world was that adopted by a Parisian grisette, who filled her small bedroom with flowers; and when her mother went to call her in the morning, she found her dead. This young creature understood vegetable physiology and chemistry sufficiently to be able to adapt them to fatal ends.

At Plymouth, a man named Jolly tied his feet and hands together, and then threw himself into the water, having previously announced his intention of committing suicide in that particular way.

November is generally believed to be the month of suicides. It is certainly a melancholy month. As Tom Hood says:

No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease—
No comfortable feel in any member—
No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees—
No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds—
No—vember.

But Professor Morselli, who has made

a special study of this subject, says it is not true that suicide is more frequent "in damp, cloudy, and dark weather, such as helps the development of melancholy passions." August is the month in which the greatest number of suicides takes place in Paris, one hundred and six occurring in that month, as against forty-one in February, the slackest month. Last year, July was the suicidal month in Paris, and it is considered a noteworthy fact that the suicides have increased since the establishment of the fête on the fourteenth of that month.

In America, "the flowery month" of June is the favourite time, the three months of summer showing two thousand three hundred and eighty-six suicides, as against one thousand seven hundred and thirty-six in winter.

Suicide is so common in London that it does not excite public feeling; there is so much misery in a great metropolis that it is only wonderful that human beings can endure it at all. Some men and women plunge into the river in order to arrest attention to the condition of their families.

"Policeman," said a respectably-dressed man, "why did you not let me do it? I have a wife and eight children. I went home last night and found my wife fainting at her needlework, and the children crying for bread. I could see nothing in front of me but death."

To his wife he had written:

"My dear little wife, we must part. But where? At the workhouse gate? No, little darling, 'till death us do part' was the promise we made, and death is the kindest and best."

Fortunately, he was seized before disappearing for the last time, and publicity given to the case by the newspapers resulted in upwards of one hundred pounds being forwarded to the Mansion House for the benefit of the man's wife and family.

"Nature intended me to be a man; fate made me a grocer," were the words written on a piece of paper, left by a young Frenchman, who blew out his brains with a pistol. That young man had mistaken his calling; but it would be a serious thing for society if all grocers were to think and act in like manner.

A spice of humour attaches to the valedictory address of a Paris cabman, who strangled himself. He wrote: "I leave this world because it pleases me to do so. I have had enough of driving people about

in this world. I am going to see if, in the other world, people drive differently. All I ask is that no fuss may be made about me." And with the view of ensuring that the letter should not go astray, he wrote upon the envelope: "To Anyone." One would like to have the reflections of Mr. Weller, senior, upon this untoward event. But, probably, he would conclude that the Paris cabmen came under the same heading as "Camberwell coachmen," and "didn't count."

"I am no longer able to support my parents," was the reason assigned by an octogenarian in Buda-Pesth, for attempting to commit suicide. This man's name was Janos Meryessi. He had for the last few years been a beggar, and was eighty-four years old. His father and mother were said to be aged one hundred and fifteen and one hundred and ten respectively. Meryessi was rescued by a Hungarian Member of Parliament, as he was about to jump into the Danube off the suspension bridge. His story has since been investigated by the police, and is declared to be true.

The Salford tragedy was unique in the annals of suicide. For a mother, half mad or wholly mad with grief and misery, to murder her children, and then kill herself, is not an event without a precedent. But for a father, who appeared to his neighbours, to his intimates, and to the doctor who examined his brain after death, to be entirely sane, to slaughter his whole family—a wife and six children, one of them a well-grown lad—to do this out of affection, and with the most anxious avoidance of any pain or violence, and then, with his victims just dead, to write letter after letter explaining his motives and his means, to draft a sensible will, to pass out among his friends in order to secure witnesses to the document, and then return to the charnel-house and execute himself—this might have interested De Quincey as much as any mob.

Yet this is what a druggist's assistant did. Owing to various pecuniary troubles, he could not bear to desert his wife and children, and decided that the whole family should go away to the next world together. He explained his plan to his wife, a noble-hearted woman, he says, who did not wish to survive him, and she agreed to it, provided only that all should go at once as an undivided household. He therefore mixed some prussic acid with half-a-pound of treacle, and gave the first dose to his

wife, in bed with her two youngest children. She took it, he says, quite consciously, and as easily "as if it had been beer or tea," or, as he again says, "like a lamb." All died easily, he wrote, and without pain, and then the father wrote four letters, drew up a will, and then went out to have his signature witnessed. Returning, he lay on the sofa and swallowed the poison.

France holds the records for suicides, for only seventy-four persons per million in this country laid violent hands upon themselves; the number in France is two hundred and sixteen, which is the highest average in all Europe. In Prussia again, a very large number of persons seem to be tired of a world afflicted with pessimism and compulsory military service. In Austria the number of suicides is nearly double that of England, but both Italy and Russia are lower on the list. The increase in most European countries has been considerable during the last eight years, but in France it has been enormous.

The total for the past twelve months is seven thousand five hundred and seventy-two, one-fifth of these being in and around Paris. It is remarkable that poverty has only caused four hundred and eighty-three suicides in all France, and this figure includes a morbid fear of impending misery without actual privation; one thousand nine hundred and seventy-five cases may be traced to mental aberration, and one thousand two hundred and twenty-eight to physical suffering. Among the moral causes domestic trouble stands first, and alcoholism next. There are two hundred cases of disappointed love, and only twenty-seven from jealousy, dislike of military service giving twenty-five. The increase is attributed by one party to secular education. "Another ten years of atheist teaching in our schools, and the number of suicides will be ten times as large," is the prediction of the Catholics.

What is suicide? The medical department of one American Insurance Company defines it as the result of disease or bodily infirmity, and pays all such claims without dispute. A few of the English companies still stipulate in their policies that if the assured commits suicide, the policy shall be void; but this clause is held by law to be no longer binding in New York. As a rule, the British companies insert a clause to the effect that "if the insured commits suicide within five years, the policy shall be void."

Upon this matter a Scotch manager writes:

"What should be desired by the managers of an office is protection against the taking out of a policy with the intention of committing suicide after the completion of the contract. Any suicide not so premeditated, can be covered by a small premium overhead, and, in fact, is covered by the figures of the ordinary tables of mortality. And to show that on this score there is but little selection against the office under any circumstances, I may mention that the policies of the office with which I am connected, have not, for eighteen years past, contained any suicide clause whatever, and yet, during the whole of that time, though many of the assured have committed suicide, there has been no single instance in which it could be alleged, or even suspected, that such a termination to the policy was contemplated when it was first taken out."

As insurance "lives" are carefully selected, it would be interesting to know what proportion die by their own hands. Unfortunately, such information is not available. Only one company, and that the largest in the world, publishes a report of its medical department. From this it appears that during 1887, the suicides numbered twenty-seven, out of a total death record of one thousand four hundred and thirty-eight.

THE TROTH OF ODIN.

BY C. GRANT FURLEY.

A STORY IN THIRTEEN CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER Gaspard left Havre, his mother had broken down utterly. All anger vanished in her desire to have him near her still; she would have consented to anything if he would have returned to be her son again. Not knowing where to seek him, she had acted on Madame Reyer's suggestion that Gaspard and Thora might have returned to Stromness. Therefore she wrote to the landlady of the inn where Gaspard had stayed in the summer. Needless to say, the letter, a long appeal in impassioned and somewhat incoherent French, was, as she said, "Greek and Gaelic" to the landlady. But she guessed from the postmark that it was in some way connected with "that young villain of a Frenchman that carried off the minister's

Thora—the misguidit lassie !” and so took the letter to Mr. Traill. He, aided by the schoolmaster and a dictionary, deciphered it after a fashion; and even succeeded, with the same assistance, in elaborating a reply. It was rather a bewildering epistle, though it was written on the sound basis of being composed in English and translated with great literalness into French; for the minister got confused between his feeling that to a Frenchwoman only courtly phrases should be used, and the passionate anger he felt for all connected with the man who had robbed him of the child he loved.

His life was desolate without Thora. He had regarded her as an inalienable possession of his own, made the more surely his by her lack of kindred. It would have been bitter to him to have parted with her even to give her in honourable marriage; but to feel that she had been stolen from him for a shameful life by a man whom he had liked and encouraged to come to his house, brought him every possible pang of remorse. He did not suspect that he wronged Gaspard in thinking that he had from the first schemed to ruin Thora—pretending to desire a marriage he knew to be impossible in order to lead the girl's thoughts up to an elopement with him. Old Osla's suggestion, founded on the idea she knew she had put into Thora's head, “that maybe da lassie had plighted the troth of Odin wi' her lad,” only infuriated the minister more. The troth of Odin was the object of his strongest aversion. He had spoken against it, preached against it, impressed on his people its uncanonical and illegal nature for nearly half a century, only to find at the end of all, that the girl he had brought up under his own eye was content with such a poor and paltry substitute for lawful marriage. The troth of Odin was worse than nothing in Mr. Traill's opinion.

Therefore, his reply to Madame Harache contained, beyond the simple fact that Gaspard and Thora had not returned to Stromness and that nothing was known of them there, a string of invectives against the former as a subtle and unprincipled man, who had deceived a foolish girl by a form of marriage which he knew to be of no account either in his country or hers. This gave Madame Harache a piece of information she had not looked for—that Thora's own friends did not look upon her as Gaspard's wife. But though she

would not long before have regarded this as an additional justification of her course of action, it hardly moved her now. If Gaspard would only come back, he might wed whom he would, live in lawful or unlawful bonds; she would never question the fitness or reason of his action.

“This explanation from the man who seems to have been the girl's guardian, makes Gaspard's conduct seem all the more wilful,” she said to Monsieur Meudon, to whom she brought the letter. “If she is not regarded as his wife, even by her own people, why should he demand my recognition of her as such? My refusal could not matter much; neither could my acceptance of her; it would not, of itself, legalise her position. But I do not understand my son now; and he is gone from me. I shall never see him again.”

“Do not despair; he is almost certain to go to this place sooner or later, if he does not come back and make peace with you. The world is not kind to men as poor and friendless as he. Poverty will soon drive him to make some appeal to either his own people or the girl's.”

“If he only would! But he will not come back to me, his anger is too great. He will beg from strangers sooner than from his own mother.”

“Then we must remain in communication with these strangers. You must ask this somewhat hot-tempered priest to let you know if Gaspard and the young person whom, for some inexplicable reason, he chooses to call his wife, return to Stromness, or make any communication to him.”

“I will not write again to a man who insults my son—my Gaspard, whose only fault is that he is nobler than other men. I could not do it without telling him what I feel, that all the trouble is his doing,” exclaimed Madame Harache. “I am sure that he tried to entrap my son into marrying this penniless girl—penniless and friendless, he says, without a relation in the world. Having failed in his scheme, he turns round and maligns my boy. If I write to him I shall tell him all that!”

Monsieur Meudon being a wise man within his limits, he did not combat the assertions Madame Harache had evolved from her prejudices.

“You are right, ma pauvre amie,” he answered, courteously. “A mother could not write of her son's misfortunes without a tone of bitterness, which in this case would be inadvisable. Leave this letter

with me; I will answer it. I can speak to this respectable monsieur as one man of the world to another. Besides," he could not refrain from adding, "I shall keep only to facts. I shall express no opinion as to his acts or intentions. I always avoid opinions—they are highly dangerous things."

Madame Harache, whose belief in Monsieur Meudon's wisdom had not been destroyed by his failure to conquer Gaspard—that fiasco being balanced by her own yet more disastrous failure to move Thora—agreed to entrust her friend with this mission. She left the letter with him, and Monsieur Meudon wrote a reply of such a diplomatic texture, couched in such magnificently courteous language, that he was delighted with it as a piece of literature; and innocent old Mr. Traill, bewildered at being described as the morning-star of religion in heathen lands, and indignant at being alluded to as a priest—"does he think I am a Papist like himself"—came to the conclusion that these French folk wanted to do him some further injury, and that their anxiety to learn where Gaspard and Thora had now gone, was due to a desire to immure the latter in a convent, convert her to Romanism, or do her some mischief greater still, in order to detach her from her lover.

As usual, Monsieur Meudon's finesse had been too fine. He really was a simple man, however shrewd he was in his business, and never more simple than when he tried to be subtle.

He was so delighted with his epistle, so fatigued in brain, too, with its composition, that he determined as a reward to take it himself to the post, and smoke a cigar on the way. It was a pleasant Sunday morning; Madame Reyer and Sophie were at church, and would not be home for some time. Monsieur Meudon prolonged his walk beyond his original intention, and when he returned his sister and daughter had been at home for nearly half an hour.

"It was quite a surprise to us to find you gone out," said Madame Reyer. "It is so rarely that you leave the house before the afternoon on Sundays. I could scarcely believe it when Sophie said she had looked for you in your cabinet, and not found you."

"Did you go into my cabinet, Sophie?" asked Monsieur Meudon, sharply, overcome by a fear that he might have left Mr. Traill's letter open on his desk, and that it might have caught Sophie's eye.

With all his lax views, Monsieur Meudon had a tender regard for his daughter's innocence, and did not want her to learn the tragedies of life too soon.

"I looked in, but as I saw you were not there, I did not go beyond the door," answered Sophie.

Monsieur Meudon felt relieved; but he determined to return the letter to Madame Harache as soon as possible. When he looked for it, however, he could not find it; and, having searched his desk and his pockets in vain, he came to the conclusion that he must have, unthinkingly, lit his cigar with it and thrown the remainder in the fire. He told Madame Harache that he had considered it advisable to destroy the letter, and, as she accepted the statement without criticism, he concluded that all further trouble was at an end, and dismissed Gaspard from his mind without more than a brief execration on his stupidity.

But that letter was in Sophie's hands when she prepared to visit Thora in Hartlepool, and when she put it in her pocket it was with the feeling that in it she had a weapon which must either crush her rival or recoil fatally on herself. She had suffered so much for that letter! Her nerves were good; her placidity was not assumed if her innocence was; though she looked so pale and fragile, she could pass unmoved through a crisis that would have worn out a stronger-seeming woman; but the possession, the concealment of Mr. Traill's letter for six months had tried her a little. She had no lockfast place in which to place it; Madame Reyer, independent woman as she was, would have been shocked at her niece's claiming the right to have a private repository. She had worn it about her person by day, and kept it under her pillow by night, and had been afraid of every unexpected glance or touch that might betray its presence. She was not sure yet that it would ever profit her; but Sophie Meudon believed that it was always better to have too much ammunition than too little; it was time enough to throw away a weapon when its uselessness had been proved.

To-day the value of that stolen sheet of note-paper was to be put to the test.

Thora had finished her household work, and was gazing listlessly out of her window at the glittering sea and the noisy urchins who were paddling at its verge, when she saw the strange lady approach her door. She had been speculating

wearily whether it was worth while to go out that afternoon—whether it would be better to walk along the moor, and looking at the pillars and arches of rock with the sea seething round them even when it was calmest, there to dream of Stromness, and to wish herself home again; or to stay indoors, and brooding in loneliness over the friendly companionship of old days, still wish herself back in Stromness. But when she saw Sophie coming up the steps, one moment of curiosity was succeeded by the conviction that this was one of Gaspard's French friends, and, therefore, one of her enemies. Mademoiselle Meudon's dress and air betrayed her nationality; and Thora felt that she was in some way hostile to her. Her first instinct was to ignore the knock which, though not loud, set all her nerves on edge; but she was not a coward; and with the memory of Madame Harache's cruelty still stinging her, she determined not to blanch before any of these people who hated and slandered her, and twisted right to wrong in order to ruin her.

It was Sophie who paled when Thora opened the door and stood before her, tall and proud, and evidently angry, with a smouldering sullenness of anger which Mademoiselle Meudon felt to be dangerous. The little courteous smile she had worn disappeared from her face; but with a second glance at Thora she tried to recover herself.

"Poor Gaspard!" she said to herself. "She is beautiful, it is true, but cold and ill-tempered. How tired he must be of her!" Then—for she was no coward either, and would not yield without fighting—she said amiably: "You must be Madame —, the lady I have come to see. I am a friend of Gaspard's, and am therefore interested in every one whom he loves."

As she spoke she slipped subtly over the threshold, leaving Thora no alternative but to take her into the little parlour she herself had just left, if she did not wish to turn her out of the house by main force.

The two women entered the room and then faced each other. For a few moments neither spoke; Thora had nothing to say, and was never guilty of making unnecessary remarks; Sophie felt that, in the character of hostess after a fashion, Thora should take what initiative was required after her words on the doorstep. After a second or two the silence became embarrassing—to Sophie at least. As for Thora, to one

who is, or is held to be, a criminal, the silence that precedes an accusation may be painful to the point of agony, but it is no longer embarrassing.

At last, seeing that Thora would give her no opening, Mademoiselle Meudon made one for herself.

"You are not courteous; you do not bid Gaspard's friend welcome, Madame—or should I say Mademoiselle?" she said at last, with frank insolence. She had not meant to begin her attack thus; but Thora's composure and evident enmity made any other method useless and unnecessary. Now she had begun with this first insult, moreover, she rather enjoyed the situation. For the first and last time in her life Sophie Meudon had an opportunity of being thoroughly natural.

Thora's cheeks flushed and paled again as the taunt fell on her ear; but she said nothing. The words brought back the memory of Madame Harache's visit to her in Havre, and recalled something of the old faintness and horror. But she was stronger and braver now, and she knew, as she thought, the worst. In France a foolish law wronged her; but here in England she was assured of her rights; she could let this spiteful woman—she knew as well as if Sophie had told her, that this girl had wished herself to be Gaspard's wife—she could let her say all that disappointment and anger brought to her lips, and then, as Gaspard's British wife, standing on British soil, command her to leave the house. So, for the present, she did not speak.

Having elicited nothing to help her in her utterances, Sophie went on as her temper directed.

"You do not tell me how I should address you. Perhaps you are wise. We can do without titles, you and I. We know each other; or at least we shall do so soon. Do you guess who I am?"

Thora answered now, slowly and contemptuously:

"I guess you to be a woman who is in love with my husband."

Sophie smiled.

"Your guess is correct, after a fashion; but you do not state the matter rightly. I am a woman who loves Gaspard Harache. True! More than that—I am his future wife."

Thora replied at once; but yet had time before she spoke for a mental exclamation of wonder at herself. She felt neither

shame nor hot anger at words which ignored so utterly her claim to Gaspard's love; only a cold contempt for this woman, who had neither shame nor mercy in her. She felt that she could hold her own against mere insolence, which had not the excuse Madame Harache's anger had possessed, of disappointed mother-pride.

"Gaspard's future wife!" she repeated. "It is a pity to predict one's lot in life too long before the event. I am as young as you, I think, and every whit as strong. You may not outlive me."

"No need for that! I have only to outlive his love for you, and that will not take long."

"That's a boast. It may mean much or little; but I am confident of my husband's loyalty." She wilfully called Gaspard her husband, to bring out the disclaimer from the Frenchwoman.

Sophie thought that she saw her opportunity.

"Gaspard is not your husband; I thought you knew that," she said, promptly.

Thora did not quail; she even smiled a little. "You are quoting the law of France, I suppose," she answered. "I know all that you can say on that point; it was made clear to me six months ago. But Gaspard has left France, and on English soil our marriage holds good. I am his wife here. Supposing he were tired of me, supposing he were to marry you in France, according to French law, here, in England, you would not be his wife; my claim stands before yours. Here, at least, I—I—am the lawful wife."

Thora stood erect, with dilated eyes and flushed cheeks, looking at her rival, hating herself for having stooped to such a counter-argument; yet glad that she had possessed a truthful defence to foil Sophie's malicious lies.

But Sophie remained calm, and answered her. "You would be right if any marriage had ever taken place here, in Britain; but when there is none—what then?"

"What!" exclaimed Thora, roused at last, "are you so foolish, as well as so base, as to deny that? Happily it is a certainty beyond your doubting."

"Are you mad?" cried the other, with a cruel light of triumph in her eyes. "You must know that neither here nor elsewhere—nowhere in the wide world—not even in the village you left to go with him, are you Gaspard Harache's wife."

"You lie!" gasped Thora, moved beyond even the semblance of patience.

"And do your own friends lie? Does this lie?" asked Sophie, taking out Mr. Traill's letter and flinging it to Thora.

Gaspard's Orcadian wife read it—read the words of bitter reproach and sorrow that had come from the pen of the old man who had loved her; read his statement that all the town was ringing with the disgrace of her flight; read the explanation the minister gave of the invalidity of that Troth of Odin on which she had pinned her faith. It did not matter that her old guardian put all the blame on Gaspard. The sin may be the man's, but the shame falls on the woman.

Her brain reeled; for a moment she felt sick and blind, and her limbs seemed to fail her. But, even now, the brave Norse blood in her forbade her breaking down in presence of her enemy. Wildly enough there flashed across her memory the picture of the Vikings' graveyard as it looked on the day she had first met Gaspard there, and with it came the story of the Vikings who had thrown themselves into the sea, to drown under the weight of their armour, rather than own themselves vanquished. For one minute more she would seem strong.

"You have done well," she said, with passionate bitterness. "It must have cost you many a sin to secure this, in order to have the power to stab me with a depth of wrong I had not guessed before. You have the world on your side; I have only Heaven on mine. But do what you like; bring me to shame or starvation; corrupt Gaspard as best you can till you own, first his love, and then his honour for your prey; I would not change places with you for all the world. Leave my house."

And Sophie, cowed by a sorrow beyond her comprehension, frightened but not ashamed, turned and fled.